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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ADANA 000167

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SUBJECT: CATHOLIC BISHOP ANNOUNCES INTENT TO CLOSE ADANA CATHOLIC CHURCH

REF: Adana 0095

1.(SBU) Summary: During a September 23 office call by AMCON ADANA PO, one of two Catholic priests still presiding over Adana's Aziz Paulus (otherwise locally known as Bebekli Kilisesi) Church passed a letter dated September 21 from his Bishop to Adana Greater Municipality Mayor Aytac Durak informing the Adana city government that the Church will close the Adana church as of September 28 (reftel). End Summary.

2.(SBU) In explaining the decision, the Adana catholic priest said that the Catholic church's patience with the "never ending empty promises that something will be done about our situation is running out." He said that, barring an Ankara-directed immediate decision to close an extremely noisy wedding salon literally abutting the Church's wall and providing immediate zoning relief, he thought that he and his colleague would close the church next week and transfer to the Bishop's seat in Iskenderun. He further added that his personal determination that the time had come to conclude the church's effort to seek zoning relief came in a September 12 meeting with Adana deputy governor Mehmet Demir, whom he said expressed to him that "I was in Germany recently and they want to close some mosques there. Nothing will be done for you Christians." (Comment: We cannot confirm this statement, however the priest has said to AMCON ADANA that he has had similar conversations with Adana governorate office senior officials in the recent past. In AMCON ADANA's own discussion of the church zoning with Adana governor Cihat Kirac, the governor seemed uninterested and almost dismissive of the topic. While Seyhan municipality officials have assured AMCON ADANA they want to be helpful and that Prime Minister Erdogan, through AK Party channels, has instructed them to cooperate, Adana Greater Municipality Mayor Durak cast the issue as one requiring long-term urban planning, more national government funding and more patience (from those seeking change), i.e. the Catholic Church. End Comment.)

3.(SBU) The Adana Catholic priest also said that Turkish officials in Ankara recently had told Vatican embassy representatives that "everything had been done to answer church concerns in Adana, when in fact nothing had changed." He said that "they talked of a park being here some day, but, look," he said, "when will this change? There is a wedding salon blaring music ten hours a day next door and a new disco across the street where people might even be selling drugs. Many people leave there hollow-eyed. I see it. Turkish (parishioners) are afraid to come here. The neighborhood people stare at them and their glares intimidate them," he said." (Note: the priest, although suffering from a cold, was very animated and frustrated, but explained that his Bishop was even more so. End Note.)

4.(SBU) BEGIN TEXT (POST LOCAL TRANSLATION FROM TURKISH OF AN ORIGINAL IN ITALIAN):

Iskenderun, 21.09.2005
Protocol Number 031/05

Dear Adana Mayor,

I am writing this letter to inform you about the (situation of the) Catholic Bebekli Church in Adana. Despite officials from the Adana Municipality and the Catholic Church having discussed (with Catholic Church officials the matter) many times to find a solution to this issue, with regret, I have realized that the July 14, 2004 dated regulation 2863 is not being applied in any form nor is there anybody eager to implement it!

On July 15, 2005, Robert Niewinski, the Father from the Bebekli Church and the Seyhan Municipality Enforcement Director Mustafa Gay met each other and Father Niewinski asked him to close down the Yeni Gvrg\n wedding hall adjacent to the Church because of the noise it created during religious ceremonies (according to the regulation, a ten meter offset from the Church is required.) But, Mustafa Gay responded "they (the wedding hall owners) have got all the necessary documents and we cannot do anything." Deputy Governor Mehmet Demir also gave an identical answer to Father Niewinski on September 12, 2005. Therefore, it appears to me that the July 29, 2005-dated letter by the Seyhan Municipality has no meaning, and at the same time

no timeframe is given about when the incident will be resolved (please see the attached letter.) (Comment: Post did not receive this letter. End Comment.)

It appears to me from the course of the case that no one wants to implement the decisions and laws endorsed by the state. If there had been a mosque instead of a church at the subject location, the events would have developed very differently!

Unfortunately nobody has expressed interest in intervening in this incident for the past ten years. I would like to inform you that I am going to close down the Adana Church on September 28, and withdraw my priests from there, and inform the (Turkish Republic government in) Ankara and the Vatican governments of my decisions, and make my due announcements. At the same time, I will inform reporters in- and outside Turkey, and explain my reasons.

I am very sorry for the situation we have experienced. We did our best, but failed to get the laws of the state implemented. I request you to inform me, should you make an important decision on this issue.

Respectfully,
(Signed by) Prof. Dr. Luigi Padovese
The Anatolian Deputy Apostle and Episcopy (Bishop)

P.S.: I sent this letter to the following offices as well.
Tayyip Erdogan, Turkish Republic Prime Minister
Governor of Adana
Turkey's Ambassador to Vatican
Vatican's Ambassador to Ankara

(END TEXT)